

## **Parks' death marks fading movement**

*Civil rights icon known through hip-hop song*

By Erin Texeira

AP national writer

Times Picayune, LA

October 26, 2005

The death of Rosa Parks underscores that the generation responsible for the key victories of the civil rights movement is fading into history, leaving its survivors with the challenge of keeping the movement's memory and work alive even as today's youth often seem disengaged.

"As people get older and people pass, it becomes more and more difficult to have that sort of firsthand knowledge" of the fight for integration, said U.S. Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., who first met Parks as a 17-year-old student and activist. "It becomes a little more difficult to pass it on." Lewis, who once headed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, added that the social challenges of today — persistent racial gaps in poverty and education, among others — highlight the continued need for activists and teachers to honor Parks' spirit.

"Her life should inspire a generation yet unborn to stand up," he said.

Defying the law Parks is one of a few civil rights figures, along with Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, whose name most young people seem to know.

But many are more familiar with "Rosa Parks," the hit song by the hip-hop group OutKast, than her full story, said Renada Johnson, 25, a graduate student at Bowie State University in Maryland, who met Parks in 1997.

"Young people definitely know who she was, but all we were taught in school was that she didn't get up because her feet were hurting," Johnson said. "They don't know her whole story."

In 1955, Parks was a seamstress and longtime secretary for the local NAACP who defied segregation laws and refused to give up her seat in a whites-only section of a public bus in Montgomery, Ala. Then 42, she inspired tens of thousands of working-class black people, led by King, to boycott the local buses for more than a year. Finally, the Supreme Court upheld a lower court ruling that declared Montgomery's segregated

seating laws unconstitutional. The effort highlighted persistent bias against black people across the nation.

(excerpted)

Johnson, who teaches black history to teenagers in the Washington, D.C., area, agreed.

“We use history as our guide to help young people make better choices and better decisions,” she said. Working with the **Kiamsha** Youth Empowerment program in Prince

George’s County, Md., Johnson links Parks’ self-respect with choices young people today can make — to stay away from drugs and alcohol, for instance.

“You won’t understand where you’re going until you know where you’ve been,” she said.